

GEORG BRANDES ON THE WAR FROM ENGLISH POINT OF VIEW

Danish Critic and Publicist Declares Great Britain Feels She Is Struggling Not Only for the Rights of a Small Nation But She Is Fighting a Life and Death Battle for Her Very Existence as a Great Power

Georg Brandes is Denmark's foremost essayist, critic and publicist and undoubtedly has had more influence in guiding popular opinion than any other living writer in that country. The attitude of Scandinavia in the present war is a matter of profound concern to the belligerents. Therefore the following Danish interpretation of Great Britain's justification for her part in the conflict is of the greatest significance.

By GEORG BRANDES.

SOME time during the summer of 1914 the great International Peace League published a lecture delivered in Canada by Viscount Haldane. In addressing the members of the league at the time he pointed out the harmonious understanding that had been reached between the two great English speaking nations and held out the prospect of a peaceful relationship among all nationalities. He quoted Ernest Renan, who, according to George Meredith, had more imagination than any other European, as having said: "Man is not limited by either race or language, or by season, the flow of rivers, or the fold of mountains." Again, Renan called attention to the words of that still greater man, Goethe, who had said: "We may look upon the whole group of civilized peoples as one large confederation, united by common efforts, and working toward a common goal."

Prof. Theodore Ruysen of Bordeaux, in prefacing a reproduction of Lord Haldane's lecture, wrote: "This one fact is sure: war becomes less frequent; lasting alliances, forming new political aggregations, neutralize and render harmless the ambitions of the individual States, and are thus stilling in a satisfactory manner the fears of armed strife. The desire for war among the Powers has thus from time to time been restrained or hindered by the numerous threads of mutual interests that bind the different peoples together in allied efforts."

Such was the belief only a few months prior to the outbreak of the world war. Some of Europe's foremost men actually thought we had gone so far toward international peace!

I, for my part, did not belong to the optimists. In certain lectures delivered by me in Norway in February of 1914 regarding the tension then existing diplomatically between England and Germany, I pointed out that the prospects were very gloomy; yet I took a part in the peace work.

In the period between September 12 and 19 of last year the twenty-first peace conference was to have been held at Vienna. The Austrian Prime Minister, then Count Berchtold, was among the committee of invitation, the very man who has been guiding the anti-peace efforts of Austria against Serbia, France, England, Russia, Montenegro, Belgium and Japan! The Emperor had asked the participants of the prospective conference to a feast at the palace. According to the wish of the members, I was to have delivered a speech at the

City Hall in Vienna. When, on July 28, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia I tendered my regrets and requested that the intended conference be cancelled. This act on my part was quite needless, as the prospective conference fell to the ground like a house of cards.

When hostilities occurred, soon assuming proportions that had never before been reached in times of strife, most of the warring nations tried to disclaim responsibility, each in turn shifting the blame to the shoulders of its enemy. This was followed by vigorous and even bitter accusations, the Government or Governments on one side charging those against whom they were fighting with inhuman and brutal methods of warring. Not only did officials and the public press of the different countries pursue this course of mutual recrimination, but artists and scientists of both the belligerent and the neutral nations joined passionately in these attacks and discussions.

I.

Among the numerous English pamphlets that have been provoked by the war—Oxford University alone, up to now, has issued twenty-four—it is natural to mention first the one by Gilbert Murray, because this prominent scholar has throughout his life stood for peace. Indeed, in his very enthusiasm for this cause, he has translated Euripides' "The Trojans," the first important European plea against armed strife, and has placed before us the fundamental question: "How can war ever be justified?" Anticipating the objections that might be raised by the followers of Tolstoy or those who argue in favor of turning the other cheek to the striker, those who believe in returning good for evil, his pamphlet is an answer in its entirety to such disciples.

As a genuine Englishman, Gilbert Murray considers it impossible for any one to read the official presentations of the cause of the war as given by the British, the German and the Russian Governments without reaching the conclusion that Germany, or a great party in the fatherland, had planned for the conflict long ago, that they chose a moment when they deemed their neighbors least prepared for effective resistance, and that this guiding party blocked a peaceful settlement of the difficulty between Austria and Serbia for the purpose of precipitating the intended steps leading to the crushing of France, and, to that end, attacked Belgium's neutrality.

But Murray has foreseen this objection: "The misdeed of Germany does not justify our committing a similar

wrong. True, we tried our best to prevent war, but when our efforts proved unavailing, we ought not to have augmented the disaster; we should have remained neutral like the United States." Therefore, this eminent Britisher argues: "Suppose you should see a criminal, a drunkard or a lunatic attacking a little girl upon a lonely road. Would you not stop him, and, in case of need, strike him?" The followers of Tolstoy will answer: "Why should I commit a sin? Let the little girl be killed! Let the wicked man commit other crimes! I shall not increase the number of needless offences that are done."

With those who look at things in this way, the question cannot be discussed. To Gilbert Murray the case appears much after this manner: Suddenly Austria said to little Serbia: "You are a wicked little State. I have annexed and governed some millions of your compatriots against their will, and still you dare to entertain hostile feelings toward me. I shall not tolerate this. Be good enough to dismiss immediately all officials, politicians and soldiers who do not like me; and from time to time I shall send you a list of persons whom you must discharge or punish with death. If you do not within forty-eight hours declare your willingness to obey my will I, being much the stronger, will certainly find means to make you acquiesce." Serbia did her best. She agreed to two-thirds of Austria's demands, but requested arbitration as to the remainder, to which she could not with self-respect consent. Austria's answer was a declaration of war!

In England the matter is looked upon in this way: The murder of the Austrian heir to the throne and of his consort was planned in Serbia. Until then the heir had not been particularly popular in his own country. In fact it was generally looked upon as a potential misfortune should that man ascend the throne. But upon his death this view of him was entirely and strangely forgotten.

The Austrians and the Germans were shocked at the deed. They even went so far as to call Serbia a murderous State. Yet no one ever called Portugal by so harsh a term when nearly all of the members of her royal family were killed by an extensive political plot. Nor was Italy ever stigmatized in this fashion when the Empress of Austria was assassinated by one Italian anarchist and King Umberto by another.

According to treaties dating back to 1831, 1832 and 1839 Belgium was declared "an independent and neutral State." These treaties were signed by Germany as well as by Great Britain.

II.

According to the English, the German speaking peoples look down upon small States. As big empires owe their being to the absorption of smaller States this view is not surprising. As for this contempt toward the smaller

and less populous States, English writers, among others H. A. L. Fisher, vice-chancellor of Sheffield University, have pointed out that the greatest works of civilization have sprung from small States. Take, for instance, the Old Testament, Homer's poems, the Attic drama and the Italian renaissance. To Athens, Jerusalem, Florence and Weimar the world owes infinitely more for culture than to the monarchies of Louis XIV., Napoleon or Emperor William II. Therefore, England will take care that the identity and the welfare of small States shall be preserved. To certain military minds in Germany it seems regrettable and even pitiable that a small community should be organized on a peaceful basis and that it should make it a policy to avoid war.

But admitting even that the majority of the Swiss, the Danes, the Dutch or the Belgians might be much improved by absorption into some big military Power, would the world not have lost something precious by the disappearance of just such little oases of peace? Has the policy of conquest proved beneficial? Has the cessation of Poland as a State actually been a blessing to the countries that divided it between them? Has not this partition of that ancient kingdom been a source of constant irritation to the present possessors? Has not the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine been alike baneful to both ruler and subject?

The small nations have the great advantage that they differ from the fixed type, accentuated by the manner and conduct of larger Powers. The existence of small nations means to the European system about the same as the personal freedom of the individual does to a community: it counteracts the ruling and deadening belief that only the brutal force of organized masses shall predominate.

If the world civilization has a meaning at all, if it stands for good will, sense of duty, self-sacrifice, live mental interests and a clear judgment, then there is no reason to believe that such should be the peculiar privilege of big nations. There is even a type of harsh, yes, aggressive patriotism which is contrary to the accepted idea of all civilized sentiments. This patriotism may very well be allied with a certain form of heroism which has been known in barbaric ages, but it is the result of a fanaticism which has always been the worst enemy to common sense, whether of religious nature, sending heretics to the flames, or a military nature, exposing everybody who stands in the way of its will to destruction by shot and shell.

III.

If, therefore, the question, "For what are you fighting?" is asked of Great Britain and the English, their answer will be:

"First, for our national honor. We have solemnly taken upon ourselves the responsibility for Belgium's independence and neutrality, and we did this at the time that country became an independent State. Prussia, who now dominates Germany, assumed the same accountability. But of what value are treaties if they may be broken indifferently as soon as such be convenient to one or the other of the parties concerned?"

"If an international moral standard does not prevail then a heavy blow is at once aimed at all private and commercial conscience. And in that

case the mastery of law, the sign of civilization, is destroyed!

"Germany gives us an excuse that, had she not violated Belgium's neutrality, France would have done so. Yet France replied in the negative to Sir Edward Grey's question, when he asked

if France purposed trespassing upon Belgian soil. Germany refused to give any reply to the same question, and her Chancellor then characterized the impending treaty as a mere scrap of paper."

Next, the British answer, "We are fighting for the right of a small nation and at the same time for that of all small nations." The Pan-Germans demand the absorption of all nations that are in any way related to them, either by common descent or by language. And the brave efforts of all such small nations in the past, and their noble aims toward freedom and independence in our day, shall they then be rendered of no avail?"

Again, the British say, "We are fighting for a democratic self-government against autocracy. It is true that Russia is ruled by an absolute government, but had Alexander II. not been assassinated Russia would have had a free constitution half a century ago, and at present it has a Duma and is on the way to constitutional government. (Such is the loving way in which we now look upon our great northern ally.) France is a republic; and the Government of Belgium and that of Japan are similar to that of England."

"Germany, however, has for the last forty years made absolutely no constitutional progress. Her Reichstag has but little influence; Ministerial responsibility is unknown in that empire, and the masses of Prussia have no voting power compared with that which is enjoyed by the rich of that land. The Emperor is the military chief, and the army and navy are his alone to dominate."

Furthermore, say our English friends, "We are fighting for the peace of Europe, for arbitration versus war, for the organization of a State based upon peace rather than upon militarism. The German triumphs of 1864, 1866 and 1870 were won by armed might, and thus military force has become more and more predominant in that country. Treitschke writes: 'We have conquered Austria; we have humiliated France; and the last and most difficult task is left, that of dominating England.' For this purpose Germany's powerful army, in connection with her new and strong navy, were to be used."

But, first and last, the English say, "We are fighting for our very existence as a nation, the foremost aim of any country. The fight may be long and the struggle a dogged one, inasmuch as Germany also is battling for her national life. She numbers within her boundaries many more millions of people than we do here in our isles, who are united by a deep devotion to their nation and fatherland that is unsurpassed in its intensity. It was Germany's intention to leave England until the last: first to crush France, next to weaken Russia, and then, and only then, to attack us. And now they are filled with hatred toward us because their plans have been halted and we have stood in the way."

Suppose that everything should materialize as Germany hoped and firmly expected? What if the fatherland should win the battle? What then would happen?

Belgium would remain a German province, and, according to Napoleon, the power that should possess Antwerp would hold a pistol pointed at England's heart. Even if Belgium were to keep up an appearance of independence, she would be included in the German Customs Union; and the Belgian Congo would be annexed, thus jeopardizing all our African possessions.

Even if Holland should remain independent in name, in reality she would become German. Rotterdam would be in German hands, the mouth of the Scheldt would be taken into German custody. France would meet the fate that Bismarck foresaw when he said that the next time France would be bled until her blood turned white. The indemnity she would have to pay would run into billions, compared with which the indemnity of 1871 was no more than a flea bite. All the French colonies would be taken over by Germany, and Spain would have to give up her small part of Morocco.

England would have a German Tannier opposite her Gibraltar and a German Agadir on the Atlantic coast would threaten British traffic with Nigeria and South Africa. The entire North Sea coast from the Elbe to Dover, or even still further, would pass into German possession or be under German control, and with the billions in the way of indemnity to be exacted from France, the Kaiser could triple his fleet! The power of Great Britain lies solely in her supremacy upon the sea. Without this she would have no hold on India and her scattered colonies. But it would be impossible for England to maintain this supremacy should Germany control the North Sea coast. The United States would hardly tolerate a German attack upon Canada; but then Canada would be compelled for her own security to join the United States.

Important parts of Australia would be conquered by Germany, and South Africa would be forced to admit large German colonies. The British States in Africa, Hongkong, the Malay States, Gibraltar and Malta, in fact everything worth while, would be seized by Germany.

But this gloomy outlook for the British does not end here. As they see it, even if India and Egypt were left them, the nation's reputation would have suffered so that the taking over of these two countries would be merely a question of time. Ireland would, in all probability, become an independent State, and Cork, Dublin and Belfast be occupied by German garrisons.

One of Germany's pamphlets issued since the war began voices Teutonic hatred of England in the following terms: "According to the trial performances of our airships, we look forward with impatience to the day when we shall occupy Calais as a base for operations against the British Isles. From there our air fleet will easily be able to cover the intervening thirty odd kilometers between the French and the English coasts in striking various ports and encircling from aloft St. Paul's Cathedral and Nelson's monument in London."

Certainly it is not surprising that such statements should breed ill blood in England. The English know full well that should Germany succeed in planting her heavy mortars at Calais she would be able to control traffic through the Channel. And they know too that by laying submarine mines from any North Sea port the Germans would render the path of the Channel doubly dangerous. And, further, that the Zeppelins need not wait until Calais has fallen to the Germans in order to reach London for the purpose of destroying the docks, &c., there.

Therefore England does not feel that she is fighting only for the right of the small States, which at the time of the Boer war scarcely seemed to trouble her at all, but she is fighting a life and death battle for her very existence as a great Power.



Georg Brandes.

IRELAND NOT PRO-GERMAN, LADY GREGORY DECLARES

"It is because I have read such strange and garbled tales over here about Ireland and her attitude toward the war now devastating Europe that I very much want to set things straight," began Lady Gregory, but recently arrived in New York from Connacht, County Galway. She dropped for the time all her ideas about the National Theatre which she hopes Americans will establish and settled down to a discussion of the war and Ireland.

The last paragraph in that "Kiltarian History" of hers, in which she has recorded tales told her by pipers, beggars, travelling men, inmates of work-houses and others whom she has met in her journeys about Ireland, is called "A Prophecy," and says:

"It is likely there will be a war at the end of the two thousand, that was always foretold, and I hear that English are making ships that will dive the same as diving ducks under the water."

One wonders if the old Irish prophet smoking his ancient pipe before the peat fire in his thatched cottage did not put the date of this prophecy just a bit too far along!

"People here keep asking me if Ireland is on the side of Germany, as she is represented here to be in some quarters," Lady Gregory went on. "I have come straight from Connacht, where I have been all through the war. I think that just at the beginning the people took a rather neutral or dispassionate interest in the matter, but Ireland is religious before all and very soon the news of the Belgian atrocities and the destruction of churches turned them altogether against the Germans."

"One or two small Dublin newspapers took the German side, but these are very little read in the country. Mr. John Redmond held a meeting at Tuam, County Galway, a Sunday or two before I left. He had a tremendous reputation. The farmers, now for the most part in possession of their holdings, and representing the real feeling of the country, very strongly supported him, and his speech was calling on them to support the side of justice, which is also the side of England in this war."

"It was reported in some Irish papers that Prof. Kuno Meyer had stated at a meeting in New York that a brigade was being formed of Irish soldiers who were now about to fight on the side of Germany. Prof. Meyer held classes in ancient Irish in Dublin. They were very useful. I was myself a subscriber to them. I do not think, however, that any soldiers attended them. I think if Prof. Meyer had come in contact with the Irish Guards or the Connacht Rangers or the Dublin Fusiliers he would have hesitated to say that they were about to become renegades, to turn upon the comrades on whose side they had been fighting, to break their oath and to break the long alliance of nationalist Ireland with France."

"It is 117 years since France sent an expedition to help Ireland against England and there should be very strong cause indeed if Ireland were to break with that old friendship. But the people



Lady Gregory.

of Ireland seem to have no wish to join with the Germans. I heard of a man in Galway the other day asking what the Germans would do with Ireland if they got it. He was asking a woman in a shop, and she said:

"Look out the door. Do you see that street and that tram line? Well, the Germans would leave Ireland as bare as that, and it's little you or any other one would ever get out of it."

"The Belgian refugees are being received in many of the convents of Ireland and are telling what happened over there, and the people say to me, 'What nature have the Germans for us over the Belgians?' One old man indeed said to me, 'If they do break in I suppose we must go on their side or

it'll be worse for us.' But his old bed-ridden wife had more courage and called out from her bed, 'Ah, what about them? Why would you be afraid? We have but the one death; we have not two deaths to die.'

"The strongest opinion I have heard on the war was from a farmer who was violently abusing the British Government for allowing German prisoners to be taken, 'for,' he said, 'I'd cut the head off every damn one of them.' There's a nice bit of Sunday reading for your paper," laughed Lady Gregory.

"Some poor man, a weaver out of work, said at my door, 'The Kaiser was preparing for it this long time; he must be a terrible man; a great shame any crowned head to have leave to bring

such trouble into the world. That was the way in ancient Rome with an Emperor they called Domitian, killing men all the day he was, and his wife catching flies for him to kill at night."

"As for recruiting in Ireland, I have not the figures, but when I left the War Office seemed quite satisfied with the numbers that were coming in. I myself live in an agricultural district, where there is plenty to be done on the farms in war time, even more than in time of peace, and there never is any recruiting from there. An army marches on its stomach and somebody must attend to the food supplies. The recruits come from the congested districts and from the towns."

"Bernard Shaw, who is more than anything else Irish, has been urging the formation of a separate Irish brigade. He says, 'We fought for France when she was a military tyranny as dangerous to freedom as Potsdam is now. She is now a republic and shares with America, whom she helped to be free, the honor of being the hope of republicans all the world over. It is France that is holding the west against Potsdam and all that Potsdam means to life and liberty, and it is French soil, on which so many famous Irishmen found a refuge from British tyranny, that is being drenched with French blood in our defence.'"

"On St. Stephen's Day, the day after Christmas, the wren boys come around. They are mummers who always come round on that day, bringing a wren they have killed in memory of a battle a thousand years ago, when the pecking of a wren at crumbs on a drum awoke the sentinels of the Danes. They sing a little rhyme.

The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,
On St. Stephen's Day was caught in the net.
Although he is small his family's great,
Rise up good lady and give us a treat."

"But this year instead of a wren they brought a little boy, one of their number, dressed up as a German soldier with a brass helmet, and all set upon him and drove him away. So I think the young generation, like the old, can hardly be said to be pro-German."

"I don't see any chance of peace at present, nor is it likely any nation will be intervening just now. At least one remembers the old saying, 'He in fights who interposes shall find naught but bloody noses.'"

"What I think the neutral nations ought to do is to inquire into the question of the alleged outrages. They would bring an impartial mind."

"At the beginning of the war I myself spoke well of the German soldiers, for I remembered the Franco-Prussian war. When it began there was horror at the idea of the army invading France, but I quite well remember the astonishment at the good behavior of officers and soldiers when they took possession of villages or were lodged in private houses. If the outrages told of them now are true the whole nature of the German soldier must have been changed by the forty years of militarism."